There Is No Person Without Potential

~ The Relevance of Ancient Wisdom

Submitted for your reading pleasure by
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with active collaboration from ChatGPT

An ancient Sanskrit insight about human potential, education, leadership and the art of making meaningful connections

There is a remarkable Sanskrit *subhāṣita* that contains, in just four lines, an idea of extraordinary relevance to the modern world:

अमन्त्रमक्षरं नास्ति नास्ति मूलमनौषधम् ।

अयोग्यः पुरुषो नास्ति योजकस्तत्र दुर्लभः ॥

Amantram akṣaraṃ nāsti, nāsti mūlam anauṣadham;
ayogyaḥ puruṣo nāsti, yojakas tatra durlabhaḥ.

A simple rendering is:

There is no syllable without potential significance; there is no root without potential medicinal value. There is no person without some capability; what is rare is the person who can recognize that capability and put it to appropriate use.

The Sanskrit is part of the traditional *subhāṣita* heritage. The verse appears in Sanskrit collections and is also cited in connection with *Śukranīti*. Since its attribution is not completely uniform across sources, it is more appropriate to regard it as a traditional Sanskrit subhāṣita rather than insist upon a single author.

Its message, however, does not depend upon who first composed it.

Its message is timeless.

The central idea

The most important line of the verse is:

अयोग्यः पुरुषो नास्ति — **There is no person without potential.**

And then comes the qualification:

योजकस्तत्र दुर्लभः **— The one who knows how to connect that potential with the right purpose is rare.**

This is a profound distinction.

The verse does not say that every person is equally capable of everything.

It does not say that everyone possesses identical talents.

It does not deny differences in aptitude, temperament, interests, circumstances or ability.

It says something much more reasonable—and much more hopeful:

A person's inability to succeed in one particular role should not automatically be interpreted as proof that the person has no ability.

A person may simply not yet have found the right opportunity, environment, method, responsibility or mentor.

In other words:

“Not suitable for this” is not the same as “not capable of anything.”

That distinction can transform the way we look at children, students, employees, colleagues—and even ourselves.

The remarkable word: Yojaka

The final word of the verse deserves special attention:

योजकः **— Yojakaḥ**

It comes from the Sanskrit root yuj, associated with joining, connecting, combining, harnessing and bringing things into appropriate relationship.

A *yojaka*, therefore, is not merely a person who “uses” something.

It is the person who can:

- **recognize potential,**
- **understand its nature,**
- **identify where it may be useful,**
- **connect it with an appropriate purpose,**

- **and create the conditions in which that potential can become productive.**

In modern language, a *yojaka* may be:

- **a teacher,**
- **a mentor,**
- **a parent,**
- **a coach,**
- **a leader,**
- **a manager,**
- **a researcher,**
- **an innovator,**
- **a facilitator,**
- **or simply a wise human being who can see possibilities where others see limitations.**

The verse therefore suggests something extraordinary:

Potential may be abundant; the wisdom to recognize and connect potential is comparatively rare.

The first two lines: nothing should be dismissed too quickly

The verse begins with two striking analogies.

“There is no syllable without potential significance.”

An individual letter or syllable may appear insignificant by itself. But arranged appropriately, it can become part of a meaningful word, sentence, prayer, poem or mantra.

The lesson is larger than language.

Something that appears insignificant in isolation may acquire great value in the right combination and context.

The second line makes a similar observation about nature:

There is no root that is without potential medicinal value.

Whether one interprets the botanical statement literally or as traditional wisdom, its deeper message is clear:

Our failure to recognize the usefulness of something does not prove that it is useless.

The important philosophical point is:

Ignorance of potential is not evidence of absence of potential.

And then the verse applies exactly the same principle to human beings.

The revolutionary application to human beings

We are often much quicker to judge people than things.

We say:

- **“This student is weak.”**
- **“That person has no talent.”**
- **“He is not intelligent.”**
- **“She will never achieve much.”**
- **“He is useless.”**
- **“She cannot do anything properly.”**

But how much do we really know?

Perhaps the student is not good at memorization but is excellent at observation.

Perhaps someone who performs poorly in examinations is exceptionally good at practical problem-solving.

Perhaps someone who rarely speaks possesses remarkable powers of reflection.

Perhaps a restless child has enormous creative energy but has not yet found an appropriate channel for it.

Perhaps an employee who performs poorly in one assignment could excel in another.

Perhaps an apparently ordinary person possesses extraordinary patience, empathy, reliability or organizational ability.

The question therefore changes.

Instead of asking:

“Is this person capable?”

we should often ask:

“Capable of what?”

And then:

“Under what circumstances?”

And finally:

“How can that capability be developed and put to meaningful use?”

That is the beginning of *yojana*.

Some reflections for parents

Parents naturally want the best for their children. But sometimes the desire to help can become an attempt to make the child fit a predetermined idea of success.

The child may be compared with:

- **siblings,**
- **classmates,**
- **relatives,**
- **high-performing students,**
- **or socially admired professions.**

The Sanskrit wisdom offers another approach.

Instead of asking:

“What should my child become?”

parents might first ask:

“Who is my child becoming?”

What does the child naturally notice?

What questions does the child ask?

What activities create genuine interest?

What responsibilities bring out maturity?

Where does persistence appear?

Where does curiosity appear?

Where does empathy appear?

Where does creativity appear?

The task is not to manufacture a predetermined personality.

It is to discover, nurture and appropriately direct the personality that is emerging.

Some reflections for students

The verse has an equally important message for young people.

A student who struggles in one area may begin to believe:

“I am not good at anything.”

That conclusion is often much larger than the evidence supports.

A more constructive question is:

“What am I good at—or what could I become good at—with the right effort, guidance and opportunity?”

This encourages self-discovery without creating false confidence.

The aim is not:

“I can do everything.”

The aim is:

“I can discover what I can do, develop it seriously, and use it meaningfully.”

That is a healthier philosophy of personal development.

Some reflections on learning

Students often ask:

“Why do I need to learn this?”

That is a legitimate question.

Not every piece of knowledge will have an obvious immediate application. But education is not merely the accumulation of immediately usable information.

History can develop perspective.

Mathematics can develop reasoning.

Literature can develop imagination.

Science can develop curiosity.

Art can develop observation.

Music can develop sensitivity to pattern.

Philosophy can develop questioning.

Language can develop precision.

Social studies can develop an understanding of institutions and communities.

The deeper educational goal is often to develop the ability to make connections.

And that is itself a form of *yojana*.

Some reflections for management

The principle becomes equally powerful in organizations.

A manager may look at a team and ask:

“Who are my best employees?”

A wiser manager asks:

“What is each person particularly suited to do?”

A person who struggles in one role may flourish in another.

Someone who is not a strong public speaker may be an outstanding analyst.

Someone who is not an analytical specialist may be an exceptional communicator.

Someone who does not enjoy routine work may be excellent at innovation.

Someone who is not a natural individual performer may be an outstanding team-builder.

The managerial task, therefore, is not simply to rank people.

It is to align people with purpose.

A useful formula might be:

Right person + right responsibility + right environment + right support = potential becomes performance.

That is *yojana* in organizational life.

Some reflections on leadership

Leadership at its best is the art of seeing possibilities in people.

A weak leader sees:

present performance.

A better leader sees:

current capability.

A great leader also sees:

future potential.

The great leader asks:

- **What can this person become?**
- **What responsibility could bring out the best in them?**
- **What support do they need?**
- **What kind of challenge would stimulate growth?**
- **How can their strength contribute to a larger purpose?**

Such a leader does not merely command people.

Such a leader develops people.

And when people develop, institutions develop.

Some reflections on innovation

The *yojaka* principle also lies at the heart of innovation.

Innovation frequently happens when someone connects things that previously appeared unrelated.

A problem is connected with a technology.

A scientific discovery is connected with an application.

A need is connected with an available resource.

An idea is connected with a method of implementation.

Two disciplines are connected to create a third possibility.

Thus innovation is not always about creating something from nothing.

Often it is about:

seeing a relationship that others have not yet seen.

The innovator is, in a sense, a *yojaka*.

Some reflections on research and interdisciplinary learning

Modern knowledge is increasingly interconnected.

Important questions frequently lie at the boundaries between disciplines.

Biology can connect with computing.

Psychology can connect with economics.

Medicine can connect with engineering.

Education can connect with neuroscience.

Technology can connect with the humanities.

The individual pieces may already exist.

The breakthrough may come from the person who recognizes:

“These two things belong together.”

That is why the ability to connect ideas may become increasingly important in education.

The future may belong not merely to those who know the most facts, but to those who can ask:

“What does this fact have to do with that one?”

Some reflections for the age of artificial intelligence

This ancient idea acquires a new dimension in an age of artificial intelligence.

Information is becoming increasingly accessible.

But information alone is not wisdom.

The more information becomes available, the more important become the abilities to:

- **identify relevance,**
- **evaluate quality,**
- **recognize relationships,**
- **ask meaningful questions,**
- **connect knowledge with context,**
- **and decide what should be done with what we know.**

In other words:

The challenge is shifting from merely obtaining information to making intelligent connections.

AI may help us discover possibilities.

But human beings still have to ask:

Which possibility matters?

For what purpose?

For whom?

With what consequences?

That is another form of *yojana*.

Some reflections for society

Perhaps the most consequential application of this verse is social.

A society can waste enormous amounts of human potential.

It happens when people are prematurely labelled, neglected, excluded or denied meaningful opportunities.

A better society would try to discover:

“What can each person contribute?”

This does not mean pretending that all people have identical capabilities.

It means recognizing that human contribution has many forms.

One person may create.

Another may teach.

Another may organize.

Another may care.

Another may research.

Another may build.

Another may lead.

Another may serve.

Another may inspire.

Another may quietly perform essential work that receives little public recognition.

A healthy society does not ask only:

“Who is most talented?”

It also asks:

“How can we help more people discover and develop whatever genuine ability they possess?”

That is a much more inclusive vision of social progress.

Some reflections on human dignity

There is also an ethical dimension here.

When we call a person “useless,” we are making an enormous judgement.

We are claiming to know the limits of another human being.

But perhaps we do not.

The verse invites humility.

When we say:

“This person is incapable,”

perhaps the more accurate statement is:

“I have not yet discovered where this person's capability lies.”

That small change in language can represent a major change in attitude.

It replaces dismissal with curiosity.

It replaces judgement with exploration.

It replaces labelling with development.

But let us not misunderstand the verse

The statement “There is no person without potential” should not be interpreted as:

“Everybody can do everything.”

That would be neither realistic nor useful.

Human beings differ.

They have different:

- **aptitudes,**
- **interests,**
- **temperaments,**
- **experiences,**
- **opportunities,**
- **strengths,**
- **limitations,**
- **and circumstances.**

The wisdom of the verse lies in accepting difference without converting difference into worthlessness.

The right question is not:

“Are all people equally capable?”

They are not.

The better question is:

“Does every person have some capacity that can be developed and meaningfully directed?”

The spirit of the verse answers:

Yes.

Potential is not performance

This distinction deserves emphasis.

A person may possess potential without yet possessing competence.

Competence requires:

- **learning,**
- **practice,**
- **discipline,**
- **feedback,**
- **opportunity,**
- **encouragement,**
- **and time.**

Therefore:

Recognizing potential is not the same as guaranteeing success.

The *yojaka* does not magically turn everyone into an outstanding performer.

The *yojaka* creates the possibility for potential to be discovered and developed.

This makes the idea both hopeful and realistic.

The deeper philosophy: Potential → Alignment → Development → Contribution

The entire message can perhaps be expressed through four stages:

1. Potential

There is something here.

2. Alignment

Where can this ability be meaningfully used?

3. Development

How can it be strengthened?

4. Contribution

How can it serve a larger purpose?

This is a powerful framework for education, career development, leadership and personal growth.

And it leads to an important conclusion:

The purpose of education is not merely to identify talent. It is to help people discover, develop and direct their talent toward meaningful contribution.

An ancient insight for a modern world

What makes this *subhāṣita* remarkable is not that it gives us a ready-made answer to every modern problem.

It does not.

Its value lies elsewhere.

It gives us a way of looking.

It asks us to resist the temptation to dismiss.

It asks us to search for hidden potential.

It asks us to understand context.

It asks us to make intelligent connections.

It asks us to develop what we discover.

And it asks us ultimately to put ability in the service of purpose.

That is why ancient wisdom need not be treated either as unquestionable authority or as an obsolete relic.

A more fruitful approach is:

Let us listen to the old wisdom, examine it carefully, and discover what remains meaningful in the modern world.

Some ideas may not survive scrutiny.

Others may require reinterpretation.

And some may reveal a remarkable contemporary relevance.

This *subhāṣita* belongs to the last category.

A Pause for Reflection

Perhaps the most meaningful response to this ancient thought is not to admire it, quote it, or share it—but to pause and ask what it might mean for me.

About ourselves

What am I thinking about myself after reading this?

Have I perhaps underestimated some ability within me?

Is there something I have always wanted to develop but have never seriously attempted?

Have I been defining myself by one failure, one examination, one rejection or one disappointing experience?

What potential within me deserves another opportunity?

About the way we look at others

How quickly do I form conclusions about other people?

Have I ever labelled someone as "weak", "incapable", "difficult", "lazy" or "uninteresting" without really trying to understand what lies behind the behaviour?

Could I replace some of my conclusions with curiosity?

Instead of asking:

"What is wrong with this person?"

could I sometimes ask:

"What might this person be capable of, if given the right opportunity?"

Perhaps that small change in the way we look at another human being is itself a meaningful beginning.

About what we can do for others

What can I do—however small—to help another person discover and develop a capability that may otherwise remain unnoticed?

Can I encourage one child?

Can I listen more patiently to one student?

Can I give someone another opportunity?

Can I stop casually labelling people?

Can I recognize an ability in someone that others have overlooked?

Can I use some ability of my own for the benefit of others?

About building a better society

And perhaps the final question is the largest:

What can I do, in my own small sphere, to help build a better society?

The answer need not be dramatic.

It may begin with one person.

One conversation.

One encouragement.

One opportunity.

One act of patience.

One refusal to label another person prematurely.

One decision to develop an ability that has remained dormant.

One decision to use an ability for the benefit of others.

We sometimes imagine that building a better society requires enormous actions by enormous numbers of people.

Perhaps it can also begin much more quietly:

One person recognizing the potential of another person—and helping that potential find its place.

From potential to purpose

Perhaps the deepest message of this ancient verse can be expressed in one sentence:

The world does not suffer from a shortage of potential; it suffers from a shortage of people who can recognize potential, connect it with the right opportunity, and guide it toward a meaningful purpose.

That is the wisdom of the *Yojaka*.

And perhaps this is one of the great responsibilities of our time.

We need parents who can see potential.

We need teachers who can see potential.

We need mentors who can see potential.

We need leaders who can see potential.

We need institutions that can create opportunities for potential.

And we need individuals who are willing to discover their own potential and work patiently to develop it.

Because potential alone is not enough.

It must be recognized.

It must be nurtured.

It must be directed.

And, ultimately, it must be used for something worthwhile.

A single syllable may become part of a mantra.

A root may become a medicine.

An idea may become an innovation.

A question may become a discovery.

A child may become a teacher.

A student may become a scientist.

A quiet person may become a leader.

An overlooked ability may become a contribution.

And a person whom someone once considered “ordinary” may, in the right circumstances, accomplish something extraordinary.

The difference may sometimes be the presence of someone who sees what others failed to see.

Someone who connects.

Someone who guides.

Someone who says:

“There is something here. Let us discover what it can become.”

That person is the Yojaka.

And perhaps that is one of the most beautiful responsibilities a human being can undertake.

If this reflection leads even one person to look differently at himself or herself, to look more generously at another human being, or to take one constructive step toward building a better society, its purpose will have been served.

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